

SOME ADDITIONAL OBSERVATIONS  
ON THE MATTER OF ORESTHASION ;  
THE SITE OF AGHIOS IOANNES \*

In my article *Orestheum or Oresthasion in Arcadia*, in *L'Antiquité Classique*, 60 (1991), I proposed the area around the chapel of Aghia Triadha as the site for the ancient town of Oresthasion. My conclusions were based on the topographical evaluation of the area and lacked the necessary ceramic evidence to close the matter. This article presents such evidence collected during the summers of 1990 and 1991, and in so doing establishes the extent of the site as well.

We remind the reader that the matter of Oresthasion has attracted the attention of many worthy scholars ; their various conclusions (and observations) have created a controversy as to the location of the town<sup>1</sup>. The ancient sources are few and brief. We know from Thucydides (V, 64, 3) that Oresthasion was in Mainalia. From Herodotus (9, 11) we know also that Oresthasion was on the direct road from Sparta to Tegea, and from Pausanias (VIII, 44, 2) that the town lied to the south of the Megalopolis-Asea road.

More precisely, Herodotus says that in 479 B.C., shortly before the battle of Plataiae, five thousand Lakedaimonians left Sparta by night and advanced as far as Oresteion. In 418 B.C., when the Athenians and Argives had moved against Tegea, Sparta send an army through Oresteion to assist the town.

When I came to study this problem I reached the conclusion that Oresthasion had to be on the eastern slopes of mount Tsemberou, thus opposing the conclusions of other investigators<sup>2</sup> who mistakenly placed it either on the western slopes of Tsemberou or on the plain of Megalopolis.

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<sup>1</sup> For a complete bibliography on the subject see : Eleftherios DRAKOPOULOS, *Orestheum or Oresthasion in Arcadia*, in *L'Antiquité Classique*, 60 (1991), pp. 29-41.

<sup>2</sup> Pikoulas YANNIS, *H Nótia Μεγαλοπολίτικη Χώρα*, Athens, 1988 ; see book review by Eleftherios C. DRAKOPOULOS in the *Classical Bulletin*, 65.4 (1989), p. 116.

Dr. Pritchett<sup>3</sup>, who visited the area in 1984, observed the same things, as far as Aghia Triada is concerned, but for some reason chose not to arrive at any conclusion and diplomatically left the matter as it was prior to his arrival on the site. Loring<sup>4</sup>, who examined the area at the end of the last century, was far more daring and confident than those who came after him, choosing to establish a precedent by declaring the site between Aghia Triadha and Aghios Ghiannakes as the single topographically logical location for Oresthasion. The conclusions presented here are in perfect agreement with Loring as they are with Leake, who also declared his preference for the eastern slopes of Tsemberou.

*The Myth of Orestes and its connection to Oresthasion*

Pausanias (VIII, 3, 1) states : 'Ορεσθεὺς δὲ 'Ορεσθάσιον οἰκίζει. And again in VIII, 3, 2 that Oresthasion changed its name to Oresteion after Orestes, son of Agamemnon.

Stephanus Byz. gives the following entry for 'Ορέστια : ἔστι καὶ ἄλλη ἐν Ἀρκαδίᾳ, 'Ορεστία ἦν Εὐδαίμων καὶ Ὠρος διὰ τῆς εἰ διφθόγγου γράφουσι, τὴν 'Ορέστιαν. The same author states for Oresthasion : 'Ορεσθάσιον, πόλις Ἀρκαδική ἀπὸ 'Ορεσθέως τοῦ Λυκάονος.

While commenting on line 1645 of *Orestes*, Pherekydes of Athens states that Orestes sought refuge in the temple of Artemis at Oresteion which, as he asserts, received its name from Orestes<sup>5</sup>.

A careful examination of the sources will show that Oresthasion is indeed independent of the myth of Orestes and therefore its location must be seen as independent of Sparta's interests in the area. This is very important because it makes us reject all the hypotheses presented by those investigators who rely heavily upon the idea that Sparta attempted to manipulate the story of Orestes as to establish herself on the Southern Megalopolitan Plain, thus placing Oresthasion somewhere on that plain. However, had the opposite been true, it would serve as proof of the fact that Oresthasion was located east of Tsemberou on the Plain of Asea, especially since "the objective at the time of the reburial of Orestes' bones was to secure the areas north of Sparta against Argos"<sup>6</sup>. That northern from Sparta area was the Plain of Asea, which fact is proven by the political moves Sparta took in order to secure it and by Pausanias (VIII, 39, 3-5), who says how,

<sup>3</sup> William Kendrick PRITCHETT, *Studies in Ancient Greek Topography*, Vols. IV and V.

<sup>4</sup> W. LORING, in *JHS*, 15 (1895), pp. 25-89.

<sup>5</sup> See JACOBY, in *FGrHist.*, 3B, vol. 2, pp. 24-29 : Pherekydes of Athens.

<sup>6</sup> KARDARA, *Αρχαϊκή Πολιτική της Σπάρτης*, p. 17.

during their attempt to control this area, the Lakedaimonians had to fight the Oresthasians. Why would the Oresthasians fight for the Plain of Asea and, in general, for the district of Mainalia had they not been residents of both?

In fact, no ambiguity exists in the matter on hand. The sources are explicit. Oresthasion was originally named after Orestheus, son of Lykaon, and as Dr. Pritchett noted also, there is no evidence connecting Lykaon with the Plain of Megalopolis.

#### *The Ethnic "Oresthasion"*

Oresthasion was not part of the Mainalian nation but rather of the Mainalian district of Arcadia proper, the homonymous mountain range of which formed the western boundaries of the territories of Mantinea and Tegea. This is made quite clear by Thucydides when he declares in V, 64, 3: ἐξ Ὀρέσθειον τῆς Μαιναλίας<sup>7</sup>. As support we can draw upon Pausanias' statement in VIII, 27, 3, where we read that Oresthasion, Pallation, Asea and Eutaia are all cities of Mainalos<sup>8</sup>. Besides the fact that all towns of Mainalia lie east of Mt. Tsemberou, common sense dictates that it is easier for an army of 5,000 men to arrive at a destination northern from Sparta via the plain of Asea than by climbing, descending, reascending and redescending 1,254 meters.

Furthermore, in SEG, 20 (1964), p. 716, we find the following epigraphical testimony connecting Oresthasion with Tegea, and not Megalopolis, in the phrase: ἐν Τεγέαι ποτὶ Δαιμαθίδαν τὸν Ὀρεσθάσιον.

Finally, to close the matter, we present as evidence the declaration τὸ δὲ Ὀρέστειον τῆς Παρρασίας κεχώριται (Pherekydes, *FGrHist.*, 3, fragments 35a-b), which positively removes any consideration of the Megalopolis Plain as host to Oresthasion.

#### *The Proposed Site*

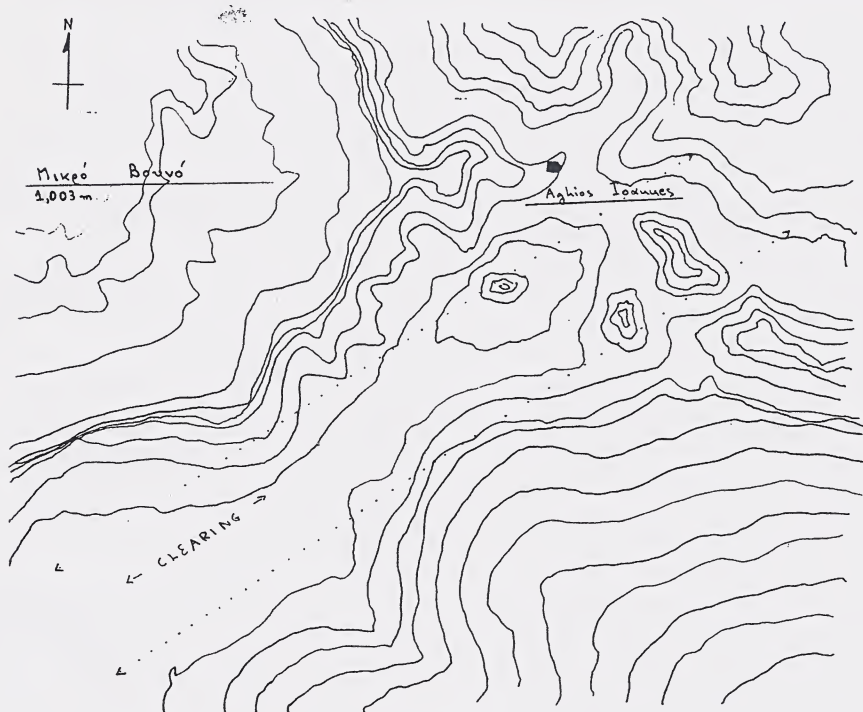
The morphology of the land in question is as follows. Although Tsemberou has a height of 1,254 meters, the two northern peaks, which are near the road Pausanias took, reach up to 1,003 and 1,061 meters

<sup>7</sup> So as to prevent any possible manipulation of THUCYDIDES, IV, 134, 1: ἐν Λαδοκείῳ τῆς Ὀρεσθίδος, we explain that the author is describing the southern part of ancient Megalopolis known as Ὀρέστια (genitive: τῆς Ὀρεσθίδος) and not Oresthasion or Oresteion.

<sup>8</sup> Philologically, the name "Oresthasion" has been proven to be Mainalian: José HEJNIC, *Pausanias the Perieget and the Archaic History of Arcadia*, 1961.



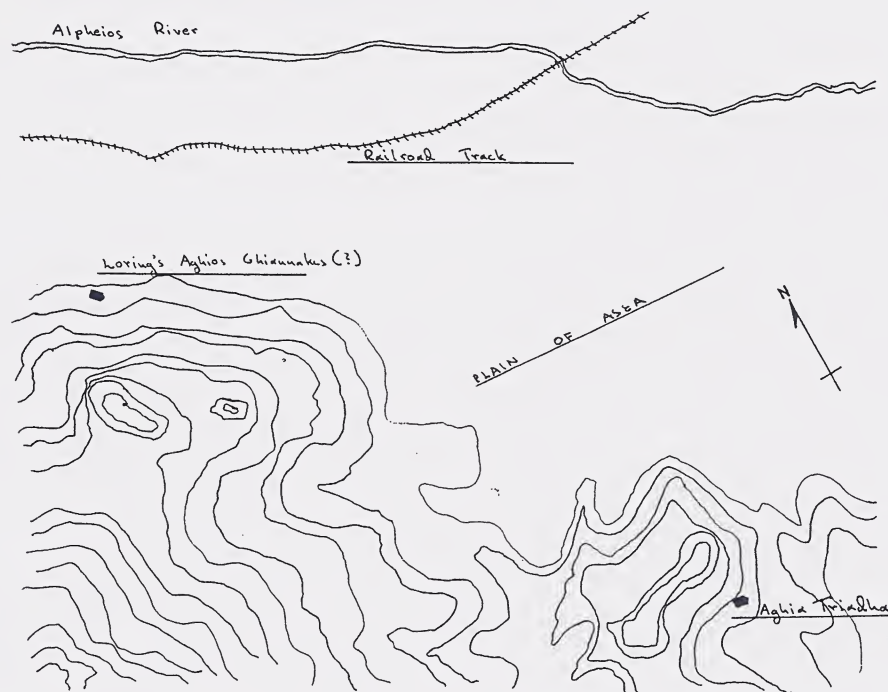
respectively. A clearing exists between the two with traces of an ancient road that passes by the chapel of Aghios Ioannes (see map 1).



MAP 1

The evidence presented here clearly indicates that the site of Oresthasion reached the clearing around Aghios Ioannes (fig. 1). The same site of Aghios Ioannes is described by Pritchett on Vol. IV of his *Studies in Ancient Greek Topography* on p. 58, where he states that "the site above Anemod-houri, which in any case was Hellenistic, is much too far removed from Pausanias' Megalopolis-Asea road for the Periegete to have made a detour to report on these ruins". The fact is that Pausanias never made a detour to report on Oresthasion, he simply reported on what he could see to the right of the road he was on. Having entered the plain of Asea, Pausanias could easily have seen those ruins had they been situated on the clearing of Aghios Ioannes, especially if — as I propose — they descended toward the hill of Aghia Triadha. That possibility increases even more when one considers the newly discovered black coloured sherds on that clearing (the ceramics in that area on fig. 2 ; the worked block on fig. 3).

The distance between Aghios Ioannes and the hill of Aghia Triadha is less than 300 meters (figs. 4 and 5). The path that connects the two bears such characteristics as to be considered ancient. Descending from the clearing of Aghios Ioannes, the traveller reaches the hill of Aghia Triadha or rather the several hills found around the homonymous chapel, all of a height of about 675 meters (see map 2).



MAP 2

On the hill of Aghia Triadha can be seen several cut marble pieces of about  $30 \times 50$  cm, surrounded by what seems to have been a fortification of the Middle Byzantine Era. Along the northern corners of the hill-top traces of towers are still present, while 20 meters northwest of the chapel there is to be found a not so small shepherd's house with an abundance of ancient marble pieces build into its walls. The entire terrain of that region is filled with medium size stones of the type used in all agrarian communities in ancient times, making acceptable the formulation of a hypothesis that places part of Oresthasion, and more precisely the eastern extremity of that town, on and around the hill of Aghia Triadha. Thirty five meters to the southwest of the chapel there are remains of small





FIG. 1. — Aghios Ioannes.



FIG. 2. — Sherds from Aghios Ioannes.



FIG. 3. — Worked block from Aghios Ioannes.



FIG. 4. — The proposed site for Oresthasion.  
Aghios Ioannes can be seen at the top of the hill.





FIG. 5. — Area between Aghios Ioannes and Aghia Triadha.



buildings to be seen exactly parallel to the ancient road from Skortsinou to Marmaria. The same ancient road turns east a little north of Aghia Triadha, reaching at one point the edge of the plain while continuing northwards toward the site of Aghios Ghiannakes.

Between the two chapels there is a hill (750 m) with two slopes extending eastwards onto the Plain of Asea. On the northern extremity of that hill lies the small chapel of Aghios Ghiannakes, the topographical study of which will be presented in an forthcoming article, initiating the search for the site of "Aphrodition".

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